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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to gain an indication of how the mass media are perceived in the performance of their reporting of the conflict over American Indian fishing rights in the state of Michigan. Respondents in the study were 42 participants at a conference on Indian fishing rights sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Central Michigan University in February 1980. The invited participants were representatives from the commercial fishing industry, sports fishing associations, governmental agencies, tribal councils, and educational institutions. Results indicated that (1) all participants were dissatisfied with the accuracy, amount, fairness, and frequency of the news coverage of the conflict; (2) native Americans were more dissatisfied than the non-Indian participants; (3) most participants believed that the mass media should give top priority to reporting the status of treaty litigation rather than to the political concerns of the special interest groups involved; and (4) all respondents obtained most of their news and information from the same types of media, with newspapers as the most important source of information about the conflict. (MKM)

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PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA PERFORMANCE IN REPORTING THE CURRENT CONFLICT IN MICHIGAN OVER INDIAN FISHING RIGHTS ON THE GREAT LAKES

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PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA PERFORMANCE IN REPORTING THE CURRENT CONFLICT IN MICHIGAN OVER INDIAN FISHING RIGHTS ON THE GREAT LAKES

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is a scene that was repeated all over the North American continent as Europeans settled the New World. Indians, once the only inhabitants of the area, remained the majority as white settlers began to move into their territory. Finally, the Indians became the minority as the settlers "civilized" the area and acquired the land and other natural resources that once belonged to the Native Americans. As one Indian Chief is quoted as saying, "When the white man came to America the Indians had the land and the white man had Bibles. Now the white man has the land and the Indians have the Bibles."

Nowhere was this scenario played out more dramatically than in the upper Great Lakes basin where fishing, in particular, has been of vital interest to the Indians living in this region. The native peoples had traditionally relied upon fish from the Great Lakes as a major source of food, but, with the advent of Anglo-Western civilization, fish became an important trade commodity and an Indian commercial fishing industry was developed.

Although Indian Tribes in this region ceded vast amounts of territory to the U.S. Government in the early and mid-1800s the treaties were, at best, ambiguous regarding the right of the Indians to fish in the Great Lakes and connecting waters. However, the Native Americans believed they retained the privileges to exercise rights they had long had.

It was not until the early 1930s that the rights of the Indians granted by the treaties were contested in court. However, for the next 20 to 25 years in spite of legal challenges, the Indian and non-Indian fishing industries more or less co-existed because of adequate (albeit changing) fish stocks in the

Great Lakes. During the 1950s and 1960s any intrepretation of the treaties regarding Indian fishing rights was a moot point because the fish stocks of the Great Lakes had been virtually eliminated by the predator sea lamprey and other environmental changes. But, during the 1970s, with the control of the sea lamprey and the restocking of the Great Lakes, the question of Indian fishing rights became an important question.

Nowhere is it more important than in the state of Michigan where officials insist that the state has the right to regulate and manage all fishing within its boundary waters. Specifically, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources wants the Indian commercial fishing industry to be subject to the same regulations regarding size limits, catch quotas, seasonal limits and gear and area regulations as the non-Indian commercial fishing industry. The Native Americans insist that they are not subject to state regulations regarding fishing because of provisions in the federal treaties they signed in the 1800s. Consequently, the legal battle has gotten much more intense during the last four years.

First the Michigan Supreme Court, in 1976, and then the Federal District Court in 1979, ruled that the Indian tribes had never ceded their right to fish by treaty to the U.S. Government. The Federal ruling maintained that the right was retained by the Indians and only the Federal Government, where treaty power resides, could modify the treaty. The state of Michigan could not impose its regulations where the supremacy clause applied. Needless to say, the government of the state of Michigan is not pleased at being told that its Department of Natural Resources can not regulate a group of persons fishing state waters. Consequently, Michigan has appealed the District Court's ruling.

The most controversial aspect of the regulation that Michigan wants to impose on the Indian fishing industry is a ban on the traditional gill nets

used by Native Americans in the Great Lakes as well as other parts of the country. While the Native Americans can also use other types of nets, non-Indians are prohibited by the DNR from using the gil nets. Gill nets consist of a wall of mesh with a weighted line on the bottom and a line with floats on top. They can be hung at any depth by varying the weights and left in place for a couple of days. When hauled in, the fisher takes out the fish that have been trapped in the mesh. The Michigan DNR contends that the gill nets are indiscriminate and kill protected and endangered species as well as commercial fish. But, other fishing experts say that this is not necessarily so. Many, including the Native Americans, contend that properly used gill nets are not lethal to all species.

Some suggest that since the Native Americans are not subject to regulation because of provisions in treaties signed in the 1800s, that they should only be permitted to fish in the same way, and with the same equipment, as in the 1800s. The Federal judge's opinion dismissed this suggestion with an analogy to the oil companies--once Mobil has the right to oil under the state's land we do not limit the way it takes this resource to techniques in effect at the time it obtained the right to exploit the resource.

On the face of it, it seems that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' arguments in favor of regulation are consistent with the goals of the Native American fishers. The Michigan DNR says that the Great Lakes fisheries are in such a delicate condition that they require management in order to conserve the fishing resources. The Native Americans respond by noting that no group is more concerned with conservation than they are and that Indian commercial fishers are subject to Tribal rules and regulations that are aimed at conserving the Great Lakes fisheries.

The conflict between the state of Michigan and the Native American fishers is not over the concept of fish management, but over who the fish are managed for. And, in Michigan, the largest number of people concerned with the status of the Great Lakes fishery are sports fishers, not Indian commercial fishers. The Michigan DNR is under a great deal of pressure from the sports fishing industry to ban the Indian gill nets because, the sports fishing industry claims, they are responsible for rapid drops in the number of certain sports fish.

The economic considerations of the conflict between the sports fishing industry and the Indian commercial fishing industry are important. Management agencies estimate that a fish caught recreationally brings in 30 times as much revenue as the same fish caught commercially. Consequently, the Native American fishers claim the state is favoring the large sports fishing industry over their small commercial fishing industry. In defense of their position, the Indians note that the treaties do not relate population numbers to the right of the tribes to exercise their fishing privileges.

In short, the controversy over Indian fishing rights in Michigan is a classic example of the "needs" of several special interest groups coming into conflict. One of these interest groups, the Native Americans, are in the distinct minority. While the estimated Indian population of Michigan is 30,000, there are at present only 1,600 Indians living on reservations which fall under the jurisdiction of the treaties granting the hunting and fishing rights.

The other principal special interest group comprises the state's sports fishing industry--most visably represented by the Michigan United Conservation Clubs. At one point in the litigation brought by the state of Michigan

against the Indians to prevent unregulated fishing in the Great Lakes, MUCC had been granted amicus curiae status to aid the state in its arguments. However, the Federal judge who later reaffirmed the Indian fishing rights, revoked MUCC's friend of the court status and charged it with trying to influence the court by sheer numbers. MUCC had presented the judge with petitions calling for regulation of Indian fishing that had 60,000 signatures.

As the 1980 Great Lakes fishing season approached, the conflict over Indian fishing rights assumed critical proportions. A number of scientists and Michigan fisheries experts believe that at least one, and perhaps other, fish species could become depleted if unregulated fishing is allowed to continue on the Great Lakes. And, while for the most part the conflict has remained in the courts, there have been scattered incidents of violence between Indian and non-Indian fishers. A former director of the Michigan Indian Commission has said it is like a situation "faced by Blacks in the South some 20 years ago," and spokespersons for both sides have expressed concern that someone will be killed before the issue is settled.[1]

Consequently, in order to share scientific information and provide for a cross fertilization of ideas surrounding the conflict, the National Science Foundation and Central Michigan University co-sponsored a conference in February, 1980, to bring key participants in the conflict together. Officially entitled "Indian Fishing Rights in Conflict with Scientific Management for Fish Population Control," the conference provided approximately equal numbers of Indian and non-Indian participants with the opportunity to engage in a comprehensive review of the conflict.

Furthermore, the conference (which was held at the Saginaw-Chippewa Tribal Reservation in Mid-Michigan) was designed to serve as the foundation for future

efforts at dissemination of information in order to aid in the resolution of the conflict. These efforts take two forms. First, the entire three-day conference was video-taped in order that a documentary can be produced and later broadcast via the public television network serving Northern Michigan (the area most affected by the conflict). Secondly, a series of informational updates will be produced and distributed at regular intervals to conference participants and others.

Because the conflict is as much a social issue as a scientific one, a key purpose of the conference was to provide a forum for preliminary discussion of these types of issues as well. Some of the most important of these social issues relate to the role of the mass media in the conflict. In an issue of this magnitude it is important for mass communication researchers, as well as those involved, to gain some indication of how the mass media are perceived in the performance of their reporting of the conflict.

This evaluative aspect of press performance is inherent in many models of mass communication. For instance, Westley and MacLean[2] in the X-C-B version of their classic model (where X is an event or issue, C is a non-purposive communicator serving the role of the media and B is an audience member) point out the necessity for B (the audience) to provide C (the mass media) with feedback as to how well C is serving as B's agent in reporting X (issues and events). Such information as how the audience perceives the accuracy, amount, fairness and frequency of reporting of issues is needed in order for the media to evaluate their own role.

Furthermore, it is important to obtain some measure of how the mass media are perceived as treating the various aspects of a social and scientific issue such as this conflict over Indian fishing rights. And, while the issue is

complex, there are at least five major aspects on which the mass media could be expected to focus their attention by gathering and reporting related information to their audiences. These are:

1. Principles of fish population management and statistical evaluations of the actual fish population of the Great Lakes. This includes descriptions of Great Lakes fish composition, harvesting techniques and the effects of over-fishing. Also included in this category would be assessments of the fish catch size and the composition as well as an inventory of endangered species.

2. Ethical and Legal Considerations. This includes the states of litigation regarding Indian Treaty rights, the state of Michigan's accountability to federal treaties and the extent of Michigan's authority to regulate off-reservation fishing by Indians. Also included here is the responsibility of the Indians to generate self-imposed conservation plans and the use of gill nets.

3. Pollution Factors. The Great Lakes are subject to pollution from industry, mining and pesticides. The most notable pollutant is the pesticide PCB, which is mutangenic and possibly carcinogenic. So, this category includes the effects of pollution factors on species decline and the importance of these factors in management policy making.

4. Economic Factors of Sports and Commercial Fishing. This includes an analysis of the economic benefits of sports fishing as opposed to commercial fishing. The fact that 62.5% of the annual catch in Michigan is the result of sports fishing and 37.5% is the result of commercial fishing influences policy decisions.

5. Special Interest Group Considerations. As noted, the subject of Indian fishing rights is a sensitive and volatile issue. Various interest groups have taken a hard stand regarding the appropriate outcome of treaty litigation so this category includes analysis of the political factors affecting the climate of discussion.

It is important for mass communication researchers to learn to what extent the mass media are perceived as assigning salience to these aspects of the issue and also, to learn whether the perceived salience of these aspects as the same for the audience as it is for the media. The concept of salience of issues is an important one in much mass media research--particularly for research investigating the agenda setting function of the press.[3]

Another important concern for those involved in obtaining a resolution

to the conflict, as well as mass media research, is the question of which mass media have served as the primary sources of information regarding the conflict. Some indication of this, along with an indication of which issues the media have focused on, will help in the planning of future information dissemination campaigns.

Finally, while data on the areas of concern noted above are necessary in order to gain greater understanding of the role of the mass media in such social and scientific conflicts as this one, perhaps the most important aspect of this conflict to mass communication researchers is that it involves a segment of the American population that has received very little attention from media researchers--Native Americans. Poindexter and Stroman[4] in their 30-year review (1948-78) of the literature involving minorities and the mass media found that Native Americans virtually have been ignored by media researchers. They stress that it is important to study the relationship between mass media and ethnic minorities for three reasons. First, comparing minority with majority groups aids theory construction in mass media research. Second, it is important for policy makers to be aware of minority audience preferences. And, third, because the media serve as agents of social change, it is important for society to have up-to-date information on media performance in order to combat racial and ethnic prejudices.

Consequently, because of these common concerns among mass media researchers and those interested in the resolution of the conflict over Indian fishing rights, a decision was made to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the National Science Foundation conference and undertake a pilot study of participants' perceptions of the mass media related issues. The results of this pilot study, which are reported in this paper, will be used to pave the way for larger and more complex investigations of this social and scientific issue.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because this is an exploratory and descriptive study, no specific hypotheses were formed for testing. Rather, a series of research questions were formulated to guide the investigation.

To gain a measure of how the mass media are perceived as performing their reporting function and provide the evaluative assessment needed by the mass media, the following research question was formulated:

1. What are the participants' perceptions of the accuracy, amount, fairness, and frequency of the news coverage of the conflict over Indian fishing rights on the Great Lakes?

To gain a measure of the salience attributed to the major aspects of the conflict by the participants, as well as to learn of the participants' perceptions of the salience assigned to the aspects of the conflict by the news media, the following research questions were formulated.

2. Which aspects of the conflict--fish management & statistical evaluations, ethical & legal considerations, pollution effects, economic factors or interest group concerns--do participants believe should be considered the most important by the mass media?

3. Which aspects of the conflict--fish management & statistical evaluations, ethical & legal considerations, pollution effects, economic factors or interest group concerns--do participants believe have been considered the most important by the mass media?

To learn which mass media have served as the most important sources of information about the conflict, the following research question was formulated:

4. From which mass medium--television, radio, newspapers, or magazines--have participants received most of their news about the conflict over Indian fishing on the Great Lakes?

Finally, to learn if ethnic or minority status is related to different perceptions of the mass media issues, the following research question was formulated:

5. How do the perceptions of the Native American participants on these issues compare with the perceptions of the non-Indian participants?

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design

In order to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions, an instrument was designed, pre-tested and revised for administration to all participants of the National Science Foundation Conference on Indian fishing rights.[5]

To answer the first question a series of Likert-type items was developed to measure the participants' perceptions of the accuracy, amount, fairness and frequency of the news coverage of the conflict. Respondent's were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements by checking one of five response categories--from "Strongly Disagree" (the most negative) to "Strongly Agree" (the most positive):

1. In general, the news media have provided the public with accurate accounts of the events surrounding the conflict over fishing rights.
2. In general, the news media have provided the public with the right amount of news about the conflict over fishing rights.
3. In general, the news stories about the conflict over fishing rights have been fair.
4. In general, the frequency of news stories about the conflict has been about right.

To increase reliability, operational definitions of the four dimensions were provided on the questionnaire. These read:

"By accuracy, we mean the extent to which the reporting has been truthful and factual."

"By amount, we were referring to the length and/or comprehensiveness of the news stories."

"By fairness, we mean the extent to which news stories have contained information dealing with both sides of the issue."

"By frequency we are referring to the number of news stories about the issue."

To answer the second research question, and gain a measure of which aspects of the conflict the participants consider most important, respondents were given a list of five types of information that the press could convey to the public and asked to rank them according to degree of emphasis the media should give each one. The list read:

Information on principles of fish population management and statistical evaluations of actual fish population of the Great Lakes.

Information about the ethical and legal considerations of Indian Treaty rights.

Information about Great Lakes pollution and its effect on the fish population.

Information about the economic factors of sports and commercial fishing on the Great Lakes.

Information from various interest groups who have a stake in the outcome of the treaty litigation.

To answer the third research question, and learn the participants' perceptions of how much emphasis the media have actually given each aspect, the respondents were provided with the same list as above and asked to rank them in the order they believe the news media have considered the most important.

To answer the fourth research question, respondents were given a list of four mass media--television, radio, newspapers, magazines--and asked to rank them in terms of which had provided them with the most news about the conflict.

To gather data needed to answer the fifth research question, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they were Native Americans. Additional demographic information was also collected.

Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to make an open-ended statement about any aspect of the news coverage of the conflict that they cared to.

On all questionnaire items the respondents were asked to answer in relation

to the news media in general--not any specific newspaper, magazine or radio or television station.

Respondents

As noted earlier, respondents for this exploratory study consisted of participants in the conference on Indian fishing rights sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Central Michigan University in February, 1980. Participation in the conference was by invitation only. Forty-two persons (84% of those registered for the conference) completed the questionnaire. Twenty-two identified themselves as Native Americans, eighteen indicated they were non-Indian and two did not reveal their status on this variable. The invited participants were representatives from the commercial fishing industry, sports fishing associations, state governmental agencies, federal governmental agencies, Tribal councils, and educational institutions.

As noted above, this is basically an exploratory and descriptive study. And, as Selltiz, Wrightsman and Cook[6] point out, a purposive sample such as the one used in this study is more important than a probability sample because of the need to interview people working in the areas under investigation. Because the aim of an exploratory study is to obtain insight into the relationships between the variables, respondents need to be selected to ensure a representation of different types of experience. In essence, the participants in the National Science Foundation conference meet this criterion perfectly. They have been selected because of their expertise in the different areas and invited to share experiences with others. Their insights on the media-related issues of the conflict should be extremely valuable for guiding future investigations of this topic.

Data Collection

The questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete, was

administered at the beginning to two sessions of the conference. Participants were told that the questionnaire had been developed by mass communication researchers to investigate the role of the media in the conflict and to obtain guidance in future information dissemination campaigns that might involve the mass media. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and no attempt was made to identify any respondent by name.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data needed to answer the first research question can be found in Table 1. It is clear that all participants are dissatisfied with the accuracy, amount, fairness and frequency of the news coverage of the conflict. All participants are most dissatisfied with the accuracy and least dissatisfied with the frequency of the conflict news coverage.

A partial answer to the fifth research question can also be found in Table 1. It is evident that the Native Americans are more dissatisfied than the non-Indian participants on each dimension. However, the Native Americans are significantly more dissatisfied with the accuracy and fairness of the conflict news coverage than are the other participants.

Data needed to answer the second research question can be found in Table 2. All participants believe that information relating to the ethical and legal considerations of the conflict should receive top priority from the news meida, while information about the economic factors of sports and commercial fishing should receive the least attention.

As for the data relating to the fifth research question, Table 2 shows that while both Native American and non-Indian participants believe that the ethical and legal considerations should receive the most attention from the news media, overall there is only moderate agreement between the two groups on the ranking of the types of information (Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Ranks = .36).

As for the third research question, the data in Table 2 show that all participants believe the news media have devoted the most attention to information from the various interest groups who have a stake in the outcome of the treaty litigation, and, that information on the effects of Great Lakes pollution on the fish population has received the least media attention.

And, while the Native American participants and the non-Indian participants differ in their perceptions of which item has received the most media attention, the overall agreement between the two groups on this question is much stronger (Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Ranks = .60).

Some of the most interesting results of this study are found when the data gathered for the second research question are compared with the data gathered for the third research question. In other words--a comparison of which types of information the participants believe the news media should consider the most important with the types of information participants believe the news media have considered the most important. Table 2 shows that for all the participants there is moderate to strong disagreement between the rankings of the types of information they believe should be covered by the media with the types of information they believe the media have focused on (Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Ranks = .60).

But, the most striking result is found when the same comparison is made for the Native American participants only. Here, the ranking of items the Native Americans believe should be considered the most important is almost the direct opposite of the ranking of items they believe the mass media have considered the most important (Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Ranks = -.97). The same comparison for the non-Indian participants shows that there is a very slight positive relationship in their rankings of the same items (Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Ranks = .10).

As for the fourth research question, Table 3 shows that all participants consider newspapers to be the medium that has provided them with the most information about the conflict. Television is second, radio third and magazines fourth. The same rankings hold when the Native Americans and the non-Indian participants are compared separately.

In this day and age of general discontent with the mass media as a social institution, perhaps it is not too surprising that all of the respondents are generally dissatisfied with the accuracy, amount, fairness and frequency of the news coverage of the conflict. Nevertheless, it is a discouraging finding that suggests the mass media are not perceived as being very responsible in their coverage of this issue.

Perhaps a more important finding is that the Native Americans are more dissatisfied with each dimension of the coverage than are the other respondents. This is particularly true in light of the finding that the Native American respondents consider the press coverage to be significantly less truthful, factual and fair than do the non-minority respondents. Certainly, these perceptions can lead to feelings of resentment and alienation on the part of the Native Americans. And, in fact, these feelings are evident in several of the open-ended comments made by the respondents.

One Native American wrote, "When it comes to reporting about the fishing controversy only the white viewpoint is sought. It is never balanced by a comment from a knowledgable Indian." This same person went on to say that the only type of coverage Native Americans receive in the mass media is "sensational" and "negative" in nature. Another Native American echoed this view and expressed the belief that this approach was a "tactic" used by the "Department of Natural Resources and sporting groups in order to destroy Indian credibility."

Other Native American respondents expressed the belief that the larger group involved with the sports fishing industry is looked upon more favorably by the media. One wrote, "The hunting and fishing. . .interests have so much more exposure to the media because it is called sport. That is unfair." Another wrote, "The media. . .respond to strongly biased, even racist, objectimes of the sports fishing groups." Another Native American noted that Indians have very little access to the mass media, "Many times Indians have taken information to the news media, but it is never printed."

One of the most important findings of this exploratory study is the apparent discrepancy between what the participants consider to be the issues the media should focus on and their perceptions of which issues the media have focused on. Both Native American and non-Indian participants of the conference believe that the mass media should give top priority to reporting the status of treaty litigation, Michigan's obligations to federal treaties and the state's authority to regulate off-reservation fishing by Indians. Yet, the mass media are perceived as devoting most of their attention to the political concerns of the special interest groups involved. This same category is ranked in a tie for last in perceived importance by the Native Americans and third by the non-Indian participants.

It is important to note here that the results of this study do not allow researchers to state whether the participants' perceptions of the media coverage are true. A content analysis of the actual coverage of the conflict is necessary in order to evaluate the validity of these perceptions. Nevertheless, the perceptions are real, and as noted earlier, the discrepancy in the two sets of perceptions is the greatest for the Native Americans. The Indians perceive the mass media as devoting the most attention to the aspects of the conflict they believe to be the least important.

Frustration at this non-responsiveness to their "agenda" is evident in the open-ended comments of several of the respondents. One Native American wrote, "The Indians' side (treaty rights, regulations, etc.) has practically been non-existant in the media. The actual fish population, and what has been done in the past (who is indeed responsible) to deplete it has hardly been mentioned."

Another wrote, "The news media have a bias towards non-Indian special interest groups in the fishing controversy. What coverage is given to Indians is usually pointed and minimal. There is a need for more information on the actual history of Indian fishing and how this fishing is used in the advancement of tribal economy." A non-Indian respondent echoed these sentiments by saying, "The coverage in general has focused upon the potential damage to the sports fishery that will be created by the exercise of the Indian treaty fishing rights. This shifts attention away from the depriviation of the fishing right for the last hundred years caused by over-exploitation of the resource by non-Indian user groups and industrial development, which has largely been disregarded."

Another respondent questioned an aspect of the coverage that, again, can only be verified by content analysis. This person wrote, "Slanting of news coverage appears to be regional or local. Reports from Lansing often favor or express mainly governmental views. Legal views dominate the Grand Rapids area, whereas, northern news agencies often accent Indian rights or mistreatments. The biological 'experts' are scattered and at the current level of activity, in the background. Most fail to realize that the current controversy could expand to include inland lakes and forests--which are also included in some treaty rights. These topics have received almost no media coverage."

One result of this study that has important implications is the finding that all respondents--both Indian and non-Indian--obtain most of their news and information from the same types of media. The fact that newspapers have been the most important source of information about the conflict suggests that those concerned with dissemination of information designed to aid the resolution of the conflict should not ignore this medium. As noted earlier, a key product of the National Science Foundation Conference is a television documentary produced for broadcast in Northern Michigan. With television being the second major source of news and information about the conflict, the documentary should have a major impact.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted throughout this paper, the present study is an exploratory one. Hence, the conclusions drawn from this study must be considered tentative pending further investigation. Nevertheless, it is important to offer these conclusions because, for one thing, the notions contained in them can be converted to testable hypotheses for later, more comprehensive studies.

The first major conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study is that the mass media need to question the quality of their reporting of the conflict over Indian fishing rights on the Great Lakes. Specifically, they should examine the accuracy, amount, fairness and frequency of this coverage. While some may argue that the mass media are doing their jobs when "everyone is mad at them," it does not seem reasonable to expect such a cross section of persons as those represented in this study to be as dissatisfied as they are with the coverage.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the mass media need to consider re-ordering their priorities for selecting aspects of

the conflict to feature in their coverage. The media are perceived as focusing most of their attention on the political aspects of the conflict rather than the legal and ethical concerns that are considered more important by all participants in this study. Admittedly, this latter category is a tough one for many media organizations to cover. Nevertheless, while the "charges" and "counter-charges" that are often inherent in the reporting of special interest groups may make better copy, it is incumbent on the mass media to deal with the most substantive aspects of a social and scientific issue as this conflict over Indian fishing rights.

The final conclusion of this study is that, unquestionably, the mass media need to investigate ways of becoming more responsive to the concerns of the Native Americans involved in the conflict. Unfortunately, the traditional methods used by the mass media to improve their coverage of minority affairs (such as hiring minority members), while laudable, may not be quick enough to provide many benefits to the Native Americans involved in the fishing controversy. There is a tremendous amount of social pressure from majority groups on the executive, legislative and judicial systems to provide a remedy to the conflict that may not be in the best interests of the Native Americans. Certainly, the mass media as agents of many constituencies, need to treat these constituencies fairly. In this case, that means quickly building bridges to the Indian community.

Some specific recommendations for mass communication scholars can also be offered following this study. First, there should be a larger, more comprehensive, study of the same questions investigated in this pilot study. A large study could build on the results of this study in several ways. First, instead of evaluating the performance of the mass media in general, the new study could be designed to gather perceptions of the performance of the

different media. Secondly, media professionals could be included in the study so that their perceptions of the same issues could be compared with the perceptions of their audiences.

A second recommendation is to couple the above study with a comprehensive content analysis of the media output in order to "check" the perceptions of the audience and news professionals. It may be that the perceptions of the distorted coverage, reported in this study, are invalid.

A third recommendation is for mass communication scholars to involve themselves in information dissemination campaigns designed to help resolve the conflict. By working with fishery biologists, Department of Natural Resource representatives and Tribal Councils, mass communication scholars can make contributions that go far beyond the classroom.

Finally, mass communication scholars should encourage and facilitate the continued dialog between representatives of the groups involved in the conflict. By serving as a resource for the development of such opportunities as the National Science Foundation conference mentioned in this report, media scholars can make a vital contribution to the resolution of this conflict over Indian fishing rights on the Great Lakes.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Fishing quarrel might turn uglier," by Tom Opre, Detroit Free Press, March 23, 1980, pp. 1 & 15A.

[2]Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communication Research," Audio-Visual Communication Review Vol. III (Winter, 1955) pp. 3-12. Also published in Journalism Quarterly. Winter, 1957.

[3]Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press, (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1977)

[4]Paula M. Poindexter and Carolyn A. Stroman. "Minorities and the Mass Media: A Review of the Literature, 1948-1978," paper presented to Minorities and Communication Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Houston, Texas, August, 1979.

[5]A complete copy of the questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.

[6]Claire Sellitiz, Lawrence S. Wrightsman, Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations, 3rd Edition, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976) pp. 94-95.

TABLE 1

RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCURACY, AMOUNT, FAIRNESS AND FREQUENCY OF CONFLICT NEWS COVERAGE

	All Participants	Native Americans	Others
Accuracy	1.905	1.455*	2.500*
Amount	1.929	1.727	2.222
Fairness	2.048	1.636**	2.278**
Frequency	2.262	2.136	2.389

Rating Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

* t= -3.70, 38df, p=.001, two-tail test
**t= -2.61, 38df, p=.013, two-tail test

TABLE 2

RANKINGS OF TYPES OF INFORMATION RESPONDENTS BELIEVE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT AND RANKINGS OF TYPES OF INFORMATION RESPONDENTS BELIEVE HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT BY MASS MEDIA

	All Participants		Native Americans		Others	
	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank
Should Consider Most Important...						
Management and Statistical Info	2.756	2	2.952	3	2.611	2
Ethical and Legal Information	1.805	1	1.619	1	1.889	1
Pollution Info	3.250	3	2.900	2	3.667	5
Economic Info	3.564	5	3.632	4.5	3.556	4
Interest Group Info	3.487	4	3.632	4.5	3.278	3
Have Considered Most Important...						
Management and Statistical Info	3.432	3	3.316	3	3.529	4
Ethical and Legal Info	3.737	4	4.150	5	3.353	3
Pollution Info	3.763	5	3.450	4	4.059	5
Economic Info	2.000	2	2.000	2	1.941	1
Interest Group Info	1.974	1	1.850	1	2.176	2

TABLE 3

RESPONDENTS' RANKING OF MEDIA AS SOURCES OF NEWS ABOUT THE CONFLICT

	All Participants		Native Americans		Others	
	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank	Mean Rank	Absolute Rank
Television	2.050	2	1.857	2	2.294	2
Radio	2.944	3	3.118	3	2.706	3
Newspapers	1.375	1	1.200	1	1.500	1
Magazines	3.429	4	3.647	4	3.312	4